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BOOK REVIEWS

The Reign of Relativity. Viscount HALDANE. London: John Murray. 1921. Pp. xxiii + 430.

Lord Haldane's volume is a clear and timely presentation of the general standpoint of objective idealism in the light of the science and culture of today; it falls readily within the comprehension of all seriously interested in philosophy, but without any sacrifice of essentials or evasion of difficulties. It is unfortunate that the meaning of relativity, like that of idealism itself, has become—quite apart from the scientific theory—extremely vague and confused. Haldane's own use of the term is best described as the explication of the principle of "degrees of reality." "The distinction between appearance and reality becomes one of degrees towards full comprehension. Conceptions mould the experience in which they are applied. Through our conceptions we isolate, but we isolate only special aspects of reality." These aspects, that is, never represent so many "separately existing and independent realities";¹ but separateness is repudiated not in any subjective fashion, but with reference to experience and to reality as a whole.²

It is especially noteworthy, in view of recent discussion, that this initial position is conjoined with an unambiguous realism; for realism can find its fullest development, I think, only in an alliance with an idealism as truly objective as itself.³ The question is obviously too wide for consideration here; but Haldane's position is perfectly definite. "What is before us is there, and is independent of the particular onlookers who are present along with it." Thus subjectivism is excluded; and with it goes all false abstraction; for "it is discoverable for us only by means of observation and experiment, and not by *a priori* reasoning. . . . The conception of an electron may or may not be final, but it indicates what is recognized as a real complex of actual objective factors."⁴ On these points Lord Haldane, to a marked degree, endorses Dr. Whitehead's contentions in his *Concept of Nature*.⁵ But this agreement is qualified by the criticism that Dr. Whitehead's final conclusion is, from the strictly philosophic point of view, too absolute, inasmuch as he "can hardly claim to have excluded nature from the imputation of the in-

¹ Pp. 36, 35.

² "It is a relativity that is not subjective, in the sense that things are only to each of us what they appear to be" (p. 37).

³ "The difference between idealism and realism disappears in the larger outlook that embraces the difference itself" (p. 137).

⁴ Pp. 36, 47. Cf. p. 211—"The world is actual and independent of its observer. . . ."

⁵ Cf. this JOURNAL, Vol. XIX, No. 6, pp. 146-157.

gression of mind into its constitution" (p. 81). I think, however, that the difference here is entirely one of standpoint; Dr. Whitehead, "abjuring metaphysics," as the scientist is entitled (if not indeed compelled) to do, regards natural phenomena as, *primâ facie*, outside or beyond the observer's mind; but this in itself does not imply any discontinuity between mind and nature as interpreted by the more inclusive philosophical standard.

From this basis Haldane develops his doctrine of relativity in the sense that, universally, "Knowledge is foundational of reality," so that "we must take account of all the degrees and levels at which it appears and interpret them according to their places in the entirety. . . . Knowledge is foundational of both apprehension and what is apprehended."⁶ At the first glance this seems to confirm the too general impression that idealism is essentially logical and abstract—a matter of intellect or of discursive thought. But it is an outstanding merit of this volume that such an erroneous interpretation of idealism is emphatically disclaimed. "Knowledge" has the fullest possible significance. It is equivalent to mind, or to experience, as one continuous, immanent, and infinitely diversified whole. It is "ultimately one and indivisible. . . . Mind, in the fullest meaning, is foundational to reality. . . . We have to interpret knowledge in no narrow sense. It will have to extend not only to notions but to feelings." Experience consists in short of "the dynamic activity of mind . . . dynamic and not static, and is in its real nature subject yet more distinctly than substance."⁷

The principle of relativity, thus interpreted, is classical. But Haldane gives it a thoroughly independent and individual consideration in its bearing upon science and religion, society and art, which should do much to clear away the distortions and misunderstandings which inevitably gather around every great historic system. Both the exponents of idealism and its more recent opponents are subjected to vigorous and effective criticism, which may be summarized in the contention that, alike in the case of Bosanquet, Pringle-Pattison and the New-Realists, the full implications of the finitude of knowledge are not realized and developed; but this more controversial feature of the volume is best left to the consideration of the writers concerned.

The lengthy section dealing with the recent development of the purely scientific theory of relativity is naturally of special interest. The outline of the theory itself is as free from technicality as is possible in dealing with a subject so abstract, and should be helpful

⁶ Pp. 124, 137.

⁷ Pp. 126, 128, 147, 155, 166.

to those who still find it as a whole obscure. But when we turn from exposition to interpretation it seems to me that Haldane, though to a far less degree than previous writers, tends to read too much into the theory in both its scientific and philosophic aspects. Its strictly scientific importance is so fundamental that some degree of overstatement—for which, however, its originators are not themselves responsible—was inevitable, and here a reaction is to be expected. Haldane's objectivist standpoint safeguards him from the tendency to argue that scientific relativity implies philosophic subjectivity; "there is not one system of space-time in contrast with which others are subjective" (p. 402); and he employs Einstein's results merely by way of illustrating his general principle (p. 39). But still he appears to me to err almost as seriously in another direction, inasmuch as he omits to distinguish definitely enough between space and time, as such, and spatio-temporal measurement systems,⁸ and therefore fails to recognize sufficiently that in passing from the latter, with which the scientific theory is concerned, to the former, which are the main objects of philosophical speculation, we are dealing with vitally different aspects of the real whole. The consequence is that he falls here into the error against which he constantly warns us—"the blunder of confusing our categories" (p. 37); and similarly he interprets the purely scientific conclusions too literally, without due allowance for what may, from the analogy with Kant's general method, be called the *als ob* element in the entire theory. Its principles, that is, are very largely methodological; they are adopted, and they are valid, only for certain abstract purposes of mathematical calculation and physical theory, so that (at least as matters stand at present) it is illegitimate to regard them as true apart from certain fundamental qualifications necessary when a wider range of phenomena is considered. This applies, *e.g.*, to the treatment of gravitation on p. 57.

Another somewhat perplexing feature of Haldane's position is his emphasis on the discontinuity of our categories. A consistent relativism demands, I think, an ideal continuity; and much, if not indeed all, of the value of Einstein's methods lies in the fuller continuity which they import into physical theory. Continuity is indeed clearly recognized. The result of the development of knowledge "has been accomplishing itself continuously" (p. 417), although the categories which we actually employ are as a matter of fact

⁸ This fundamental distinction, curiously enough, receives due emphasis from the scientists themselves. Cf. this JOURNAL, XVIII., pp. 214, 215. Also Eddington, *Nature*, Feb. 17, 1921, p. 804: "Worldwide time is a mathematical system; it has not any metaphysical significance."

seriously lacking in interconnection. But idealist logic would, I think, regard this defect as due merely to our limited knowledge. Haldane, however, seems to regard discontinuity not only as occasional and transitory, but even as essential. He speaks of "levels or degrees in knowledge which have relations to each other, but are not reducible to each other. For they are ultimate. . . . The actual exhibits itself in orders irreducible to each other. . . . A living being that knows seems to belong to an order quite different in kind from that of one that lives without knowing. . . . Mechanism and life belong to different orders neither of which is explicable in the terms that belong to the other."⁹ If this is literally true any continuous and progressive development of knowledge would surely be impossible; but when we consider its actual character, what we seem to find is an unceasing growth in continuity which goes on, in principle, without limit;¹⁰ unless of course we define our categories to begin with so that they become mutually exclusive, and "mechanism," *e.g.*, means "non-living" while "life" means "non-mechanical." Haldane bases his idealistic relativity on "The Hegelian Principle" (chap. XV); and I welcome his plea for the closer study of Hegel, together with his protest against the prevailing misconception of his system. "No philosophical doctrine has been more misrepresented or given to the world in a more distorted form than has been Hegelianism in current literature" (p. 344). But the basal principle of Hegel's *Logic* is the continuity of the transition from category to category;¹¹ so that if we are to take the statements just quoted as really typical, there seems to be a fundamental discrepancy between Haldane's position and that of Hegel; the latter, however, appears to be more firmly established by each advance in the content of knowledge.

But there is ample room for differences of opinion here, and Lord Haldane would be the last to expect complete unanimity. His volume, taken as a whole, is a very valuable and weighty contribution to philosophical literature.

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⁹ Pp. 128, 132, 147, 161.

¹⁰ *Cf.* p. 415. "The capacity of man to interpret is unlimited in its range, because the range of mind is unlimited in its power of framing general conceptions." But does not this in itself imply that categories are not (in principle of course) ultimately irreducible?

¹¹ *Cf.* McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic*, secs. 112-114, and *Commentary*, sec. 12.